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# J.A. HINES

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STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 42ND ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

## **Testimony in support of Senate Bill 155**

Good morning. I would like to thank Chairperson Vinehout and the members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Higher Education for giving Sen. Lassa and me the opportunity to testify before you this morning on very important piece of legislation.

Senator Lassa and I have introduced Senate Bill 155 in order to help protect Wisconsin's food animal herds, especially our dairy herds. A shortage of food animal veterinarians could be devastating to the state's dairy industry as farmers are unable to find someone qualified to care for their cattle, potentially leading to poor milk production or an outbreak of a highly contagious disease.

A shortage of food animal veterinarians also puts a strain on the state's Public Health system. Veterinarians historically have been on the front lines of combating outbreaks of infectious diseases because many of the diseases we are concerned about are zoonotic, which means they spread from animal to human. Veterinarians will see these diseases in the animal population before they spread to the human population, giving the public health community a better chance to prepare and prevent a massive outbreak.

More and more veterinary students are focusing on small animal practice because, frankly, the hours are better and so is the money. The problem with that is a large number of the food animal veterinarians currently practicing in Wisconsin are getting older and nearing retirement, but there aren't a sufficient number of students to replace them. After talking with the dean of the UW School of Veterinary Medicine, Dr. Daryl Buss, and reviewing what other professions have done to help offset shortages in their professions, Senator Lassa and I believe a loan forgiveness program for students who wish to practice on food animals could help address the looming shortage.

SB 155 will create a program to be administered by the Higher Education Aids Board (HEAB) that will provide a veterinary student with up to \$12,500 per year for up to four years, with a maximum overall loan of \$50,000. Upon completion of veterinary school, the student agrees to practice as a food animal veterinarian for up to 6 years, and 75% of their income must be derived from servicing food animals. During each of the first four years of practice, HEAB will forgive 10% of the loan's principal and interest. During each year five and six, HEAB will forgive 20% of the loan's principal and interest for total forgiveness of 80%. Should the individual not fulfill the six-year or 75% requirements, HEAB will have the authority to charge a higher interest rate as a penalty.



SB 155 is supported by the UW School of Veterinary Medicine, UW School of Medicine and Public Health, the Wisconsin Veterinary Medical Association, the Department of Ag, Trade, and Consumer Protection, and the state's public health community. I would ask that the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Higher Education also support this bill and I thank you for your time this morning.



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DATE: November 14, 2007  
TO: Members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Higher Education  
FROM: Ray Pawlisch, DVM, WVMA President  
SUBJECT: Support of Senate Bill 155

On behalf of the Wisconsin Veterinary Medical Association (WVMA), I respectfully ask for your support of Senate Bill 155. This bill would establish a loan forgiveness program for new veterinarians who choose to practice food animal medicine in the state of Wisconsin.

Attracting new veterinarians into food animal medicine is imperative. Not only do food animal veterinarians protect our food supply by ensuring food-producing animals are healthy, but in so doing they also ensure that Wisconsin can continue to export animals thereby maintaining a vital segment of our economy. There is no question that food animal veterinarians are our first and best line of defense against diseases such as foot and mouth, e-coli, salmonella, cryptosporidium, mad cow disease, anthrax, pseudorabies, and tuberculosis which can be transferred from animals to humans.

A real life example of the public health importance of food animal veterinarians occurred in 1976 when my father, Dr. Ronaldean Pawlish, visited a farm in Decatur to treat sick coughing hogs. The hired man who was milking the cows and caring for the swine came out of the barn complained about feeling very sick. My father asked if he had gone to the doctor. He replied, "No." My father quickly recognized that the hogs and that man were experiencing similar symptoms. He next contacted another veterinarian, Dr. Barney Easterday from UW-Madison's Veterinary Science Department. My father collected nasal swabs, blood samples, and lung tissue from a dead hog. He also collected throat washings from the sick man. The samples were taken to the UW campus where they were evaluated. Sure enough, they were the same viruses. This virus became known as Swine Flu, the first documented case of transmission of an influenza virus from hogs to a person. If not for a food animal veterinarian, such a link may never have been found.

There doesn't appear to be a shortage of food animal veterinarians in Wisconsin, all of our data points to the possibility of it becoming a problem. For example, in 1997, 45 percent of Wisconsin veterinarians touched a cow on a daily basis; today 32 percent do. And in 1997, 35 percent worked exclusively on companion animals; today that has increased to 49 percent. Further, those who are practicing food animal medicine are getting older. Fifty-four percent of food animal veterinarians in Wisconsin are older than 45.

We are told that new graduates want better hours and better pay than what is offered in a rural practice. We don't deny that practicing food animal medicine is a physically demanding lifestyle

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that may not be desirable to everyone. However, there are new graduates who want to live and work in a rural area, but are discouraged because of their heavy student debts.

I personally know of a new graduate who started in food animal medicine. She had grown up on a farm and loved cows, but changed her career path two years after graduation because her debt load was "eating her up." She joined a biomedical firm. Recently she told me she regretted the decision, but felt she had no other alternative.

Again, the concern over a shortage of food animal veterinarians is not only for the health and well-being of animals, but also for the safety of the food supply and the health and well-being of the consuming public. The further removed animals are from veterinary supervision, the greater the risk is to the animal, owner and public.

You have an opportunity to encourage new veterinarians to practice food animal medicine by alleviating their debt, which is the greatest deterrent from realizing their dreams.

We urge your support of SB 155. Thank you.